

Psalm 90: 1 – 2 (NRSV)

Lord, you have been our dwelling-place in all generations.
Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth
and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

Hymn StF 67/H&P 277

1. This, this is the God we adore,
our faithful, unchangeable friend,
whose love is as great as his power,
and neither knows measure nor end:

2. 'Tis Jesus, the first and the last,
whose Spirit shall guide us safe home;
we praise him for all that is past,
and trust him for all that's to come.

Joseph Hart (1712 – 1767)

Prayers of Praise and Confession

In times of trouble, we call upon God to help us, to save us, to be with us,
and God answers, always and forever.

God is with us, giving strength and comfort,

clarity and purpose and for this, and so much more, we praise God.

God, our Creator and our Redeemer, we offer our meagre praise today and all days,
whether we sing as we go, or sit in quiet meditation, know that we love you,
trust you, live for you and in you, rejoicing that we are all made in your image,
fearfully and wonderfully made,

and that each of us is loved for who and what we are.

But, loving God, we know that we fall short,

we are tempted and give in to temptation:

the unkind word that slips out, the small action that wounds,

the opportunities to be as Jesus to others missed through fear
of standing up for what is right, speaking out for the voiceless,
enacting a small kindness.

As we promise to do better, to think before we speak and act,

to reflect on ways to improve, forgive us, we pray,

for what is past and give us courage to trust in you for the future,

whatever it may bring. In the name of Jesus, our Saviour, we pray as he taught us...

Lord's Prayer – Our Father in heaven...

Matthew 25: 14 – 30 (NRSV)

'For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. Then the one who had received the five talents came forward,

bringing five more talents, saying, "Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents." His master said to him, "Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master." And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, "Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents." His master said to him, "Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master." Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, "Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours." But his master replied, "You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Reflection

What is your talent, or are your talents? Don't tell me you have none, everyone has something. You may not be as good at something as someone else you know, but you may still be good.

When my older sister and I were about 11 and 10 our Nana, after much nagging to our parents, bought us a piano - a second hand upright, and we both started lessons. It was fairly obvious from the start that my sister was good, born out by her reaching grade 8 in six years and then going on to do a music degree. I struggled rather more. I could do the scales and arpeggios with aplomb, but I couldn't play the classical pieces, as I played what I heard rather than what was written and I also managed to dodge any exams. However, my sister bought me, one birthday, a book of music which had, amongst other things, Eye Level and The Entertainer sheet music. I loved it and learned to play both and then discovered that she could play neither as what was written down is not exactly how it is played. I found a talent. I will never be great at playing the piano, especially as I haven't had an instrument for 8 years, but I know that I can, and do, find pleasure in playing.

When we read the parable from Matthew, even though the word 'talent' is used, it is a monetary thing, not a gift or skill as we would use the word today, but the parable works for these things too. We all have things that we can do that are worthy. Not everyone can be skilled at sports, drama, music, dancing or baking – the things that have entertained us through our own curtailed activities, and certainly there are very few who are skilled enough at these things to make a living from them, are good enough that others will pay to watch the performance. But this doesn't mean that we should abandon our lesser skills, our non-performance skills.

Your skill may be with numbers, bookkeeping, organising, arranging and those 'background' talents that allow our societies to function; they may be with food or crafts that bring delight and warmth to others, simply because you have done something yourself rather than bought; you may have the gift of listening and explaining to others who find things confusing, you may have the talent of allowing others to speak what's on their hearts and minds and to feel better for having shared. These, and more, are all amazing gifts, skills, talents, that we can share so that others can benefit, grow, learn and we can too in the sharing. These are the talents that God enables to create a better world.

Or your talent may be with money. You may have the skills to be an entrepreneur and make lots of money; or you may have worked hard and got a good job that pays well; you may have saved during your working life and have a good pension; you may have inherited a goodly sum. However your wealth came to you, it too is a talent to be shared. Making money for the sake of making money becomes meaningless, hoarding it so that you have it just for yourself gets nowhere and generally makes you miserable, mean, and suspicious of others and their motives. But if we use our money to buy things, preferably locally, to give so that others can have too and increase their own gifts and skills, to back good causes, then we increase our pool of talents. Back to the piano. If our parents hadn't invested in us playing the piano, then my sister would not have gone on to be a piano and singing teacher and many people would not have had an outlet to help their mental health during this pandemic.

We never know what is ahead of us, we can only live in the present, learning from the past. Jesus' parables are to help us in that learning – however small you think your own talents are, invest in them, use them and we can all benefit, including ourselves.

Hymn StF 726/H&P 377

1. Come to us, creative Spirit,
in our Father's house,
every natural talent foster,
hidden skills arouse,
that within your earthly temple
wise and simple
may rejoice.
2. Poet, painter, music maker,
all your treasures bring;
artist, actor, graceful dancer,
make your offering;
join your hands in celebration!
Let creation
shout and sing!

3. Word from God eternal springing,
fill our minds we pray,
and in all artistic vision give integrity.
May the flame, within us burning,
kindle yearning
day by day
4. In all places and for ever
glory be expressed
to the Son, with God the Father,
and the Spirit blest.
In our worship and our living
keep us striving
towards the best.

David Mowbray (b1938)

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

God of wisdom and love, giver of all good things,
we thank you for your loving-kindness,
and for your constant care over all creation.

We bless you for the gift of life, for your guiding hand upon us,
and your sustaining love within us.

We thank you for friendship and duty, for good hopes and precious memories,
for joys that cheer us, and the trials that teach us to trust in you.

We bless you for Jesus Christ, your Son, our Saviour,
for the presence of your Spirit, for your Church, the body of Christ
and all the means of grace.

*We call to mind issues in the world, this nation, our lives and our family and friends
and think on them in a time of silence:*

In our weakness, God is our strength – we pray that we can bring strength to others
as they support us in these difficult times;
in our darkness, God is our light – we pray that we can bring light to others as they
shine in the dark of these worrying times;
in our sorrows, God is our comfort and peace – we pray that we can bring peace
and comfort to others as they calm and console us in these frightening times.

From everlasting to everlasting you are our God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God, glorified for ever. Amen.

Hymn StF 363

My Jesus, my Saviour,
Lord there is none like you.
All of my days I want to praise
the wonders of your mighty love.
My comfort, my shelter,
tower of refuge and strength,
let every breath, all that I am,
never cease to worship you.

*Shout to the Lord all the earth, let us sing,
power and majesty, praise to the King.
Mountains bow down
and the seas will roar
at the sound of your name.
I sing for joy at the work of your hands.
Forever I'll love you, forever I'll stand.
Nothing compares to the
promise I have in you.*

Darlene Zschech (b1965)

Blessing (for our homes)

Visit Lord, we pray, this place
and drive far from it all the snares of the enemy.
May your holy angels dwell here to keep us in peace
and may your blessing be upon us evermore. Amen.